



In Touch South India

Headlines from the U.S. Consulate General Chennai



February— March 2007

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044-2857-4000

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044-2811-2020

Upcoming Films: Hollywood Musicals (Bi-weekly Friday Films)



February 2
Music Man

February 23 (in lieu of Feb. 16)
A Star is Born

March 02
Woodstock

March 16
Fiddler on the Roof

March 30
Mame

Co-sponsored by
Madras Film Society and
Indo-Cine Appreciation Foundation

All films at 6:30 p.m.
at Film Chamber Theater
Gemini Circle Chennai - 6

Seats on a first come first
served basis

Holiday Season

The holiday season in the United States begins on the last Thursday of November with Thanksgiving Day, commemorating the first harvest of the Pilgrims who settled in America, and ends after New Year's Day. South Indians mark roughly the same period with performances of Carnatic music and dance and the four-day harvest festival which in Tamil Nadu is called Pongal. This year Eid-al-Adha fell within this time frame.

Those of us lucky enough to be Americans living in South India enjoy the best of two worlds, celebrating Christmas, Chanukah and other holidays long familiar to us and taking part in the rich cultural offerings available locally.

Several American officers from the Consulate were privileged to be guests of honor and audience members at the 17th Annual Hamsadhwani NRI Music and Dance Festival, the Bharath Kalachar Music and Dance Festival, the 4th Annual Chennai International Film Festival and many other cultural events. The Consulate reciprocated by inviting the people of Hyderabad and Chennai to hear the hip-hop group Timeless Voices of America (see photo this page and article next page). The brilliant performances we witnessed, including by non-resident Indians (NRIs) and people of Indian origin (PIO), were testimony of the vibrancy of South Indian cultural fare, both classical and contemporary.

(Continued on page 2)



Timeless Voices of America's Sire Turnbull provides hands-on DJ training during workshop at the Unwind Centre in Chennai.



One indication of the broadening and strengthening ties between the United States and India is the number of official and non-official visitors, including many to South India. Since the previous edition of "In Touch," high-level official visitors have included U.S. Senator from Pennsylvania Arlen Specter, Director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control Julie Gerberding, Deputy U.S. Trade Representative Karan Bhatia, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Nick Burns and several other senior Department of State officials. These visitors and many others from both the public and private sectors come to see for themselves the remarkable transformation taking place in India and to pursue specific aspects of the rich and varied U.S.-India agenda. Providing a valuable experience for such visitors is an important function of the Consulate General and one which could not be accomplished without the close cooperation of many Indian government officials, business people, trade associations, universities and other interlocutors. We thank them for their support.

Amidst all of our other work, improving the visa services we offer to the Indian public remains the top priority for the U.S. Mission, including Consulate General Chennai. We are pleased that thanks to the very hard work of our staff and strong support from our Washington headquarters and Embassy in New Delhi, the previous long delay for visa interview appointments has been reduced to two weeks or less. We continue to work hard to sustain the gains we have made.

-David T. Hopper, Consul General

porary, both in its birthplace and among the Indian diaspora. The experience opened our eyes and ears to something that for us was new, exotic and beautiful.

Carnatic music and dance, like the exquisite Pongal Kolam patterns made from rice flour, remind us of the intertwining of art and worship. Gospel music in the United States similarly is an expression of faith. India and America are lands of many religions and, not inconsequentially, artistic traditions. There are a number of reasons to prize and protect pluralism, tolerance and religious freedom; art is one of them.

Not everyone respects others' beliefs and expression thereof; think of the Talibans' destruction of colossal Buddha statues in Afghanistan. Worse, we live in a world where religious bigotry is an excuse for killing people and tearing countries apart. All of us have a role in fighting against the ideology of hatred, not just by being tolerant but by positively honoring diversity. Nations that respect the freedom to worship serve as bulwarks against extremism and conflict.

As the holiday season comes to an end, it is a good time to reflect on the values we hold in common, such as a commitment to religious liberty. For both Indians and Americans, religious freedom is rooted in our historical development and is an abiding constitutional principle. When each of us is free to worship in his or her own way and is invited to partake in each other's religious and cultural celebrations, the ideals of tolerance and brotherhood truly have become a reality.

"It's about attitude..."

In January, the Timeless Voices of America (TVOA) rapped and hip-hopped their way through Hyderabad and Chennai. Consisting of ChrisRel (lyricist), Jason "Sire" Turnbull (DJ/Producer) and Denny Jackson (vocalist), the trio performed to enthusiastic audiences at the Indian School of Business and Taj Deccan in Hyderabad and at the Unwind Centre, Havana and the Indian Institute of Technology (as part of Saarang 2007) in Chennai.

The three New Yorkers also led a workshop at the Unwind Centre which attracted a large number of local hip-hop musicians who were thrilled about learning the latest in DJ techniques and style currently in vogue in the United States (see photo on first page). They explained to their fans that hip-hop "is about attitude, live performance and spontaneity."

One of the highlights of the TVOA's visit was meeting with South Indian music director Yuvan Shankar Raja who played tracks from his upcoming films. They also had the opportunity to meet with *ghatam* maestro Subhash Chandran and *kanjira* maestro Ganesh Kumar and heard samples of Indo-Western and jazz fusion music.

Following their visit to South India, the TVOA will perform in Kolkata before proceeding to Malaysia and Burma for more concerts.

Positive Images



Major League Baseball's Jim Small, based in Tokyo, interacts with sports personalities in Chennai using digital video conference technology.



Public Affairs Officer Fred Kaplan at the Hamsadhwani NRI Music and Dance Festival. Dancer Dr. Leela Samson is seen on the left.



Children having fun at the American International School Chennai (AISC) Charity Fair on January 20. About Rs. one lakh was raised for local charities including a shelter for children with HIV/AIDS.

Tsunami Relief: Building Back Better

The second anniversary of the Indian Ocean tsunami on December 26 was, first and foremost, a time to remember the victims of that tragic event. The period around the anniversary also provided opportunities to admire the resilience of tsunami survivors and to review the efforts that have been made by governments, private organizations and individuals to assist them.

On January 3 in Pudhupattinam, Consul General David Hopper joined representatives from the C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar Foundation and from the town of Wooster, Ohio, to inaugurate new housing paid for by funds raised by citizens of Wooster. In honor of those contributions, the area of 26 new houses was named Wooster Nagar.

On January 8 in New Kalapakkam, Mr. Hopper together with a local NGO, Voluntary Health Services and the Association of Tamil Nadu Medical Graduates in America inaugurated a new community center funded by the Association. This served as a reminder of the prominent role played by the large Indian-American community in providing funds for tsunami relief and other worthwhile projects in their "old" home. These projects are but two examples of the \$1.8 billion dollars that Americans donated for tsunami relief worldwide.

Other tsunami-affected municipalities in Tamil Nadu, such as Cuddalore and Nagapattinam, have benefited from the work of volunteers and funds provided by the U.S. Agency for International Development to design and build new parks and playgrounds. Local communities have participated directly in all of these programs. Indeed, their involvement is crucial. Community participation through ideas, financial contributions and time helps insure that the improvements are lasting.

Throughout this effort, our theme continues to be "building back better," the idea being that we should not merely restore tsunami-affected communities, but help them to build better, more environmentally friendly and more sustainable housing, facilities and livelihoods than they had before.

Consular Corner:

Focus on Student Visas

Every year in the spring and summer, the U.S. Consulate General in Chennai interviews thousands of student visa applicants. Although each student has a unique story to tell the interviewing officer, because of the overuse of visa consultants, those unique and individual stories become lost and retold through the myopic lens of the visa consultant. Even if some consultants provide useful advice regarding to which schools students should apply, the reliance on visa consultants often has a few important detrimental effects for our student visa applicants.

Prospective students should be prepared to articulate how they chose their university and course of study, to discuss future plans, and to provide the individual mark sheets and diplomas from previous institutions attended. They may also wish to provide scores from standardized tests required by the educational institution. Applicants for student visas are required to provide financial evidence which shows that the student or the student's parents have enough readily available funds to meet all expenses for the first year of study. The officer also must be satisfied that, barring unforeseen circumstances, adequate funds will be available for each subsequent year of study from the same source or from other specifically identified and reliable financial sources..

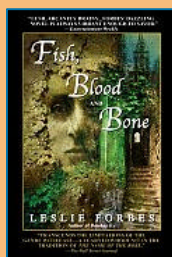
It is in the preparation of these documents where visa consultants often lead students astray. Every year, prospective students present consular officers with fake bank statements and degree certificates in order to present a document the visa consultant has insisted the students need in order to obtain a student visa. Presenting fraudulent documentation can lead to a permanent and lifetime visa ineligibility for the prospective student.

The consequences of this misrepresentation are detrimental to the student because both they and the U.S. ultimately lose an important opportunity. The U.S. State Department is committed to bringing qualified students to the America to study. Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs, Maura Harty, has stated, "We believe that the best advertisement for America is America. There is no better way to learn about the United States than to live and study and work with Americans in this great country of ours. The loss of this opportunity for even a single student is a loss we are not prepared to bear."

"Outside of a dog, a man's best friend is a book. Inside of a dog, it's too dark to read." (Groucho Marx)

Marielle Martin
General Services Officer

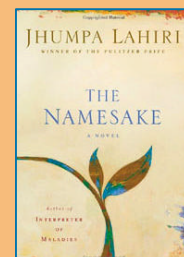
Fish, Blood and Bone
by Leslie Forbes



On the surface *Fish Blood and Bone* is a crime drama set in London involving a forensic photographer's search for her friend's killer. But the story quickly moves to India and then to the borderlands between Tibet and Bhutan as Claire Fleetwood investigates the intertwining of the victim's past with her own family history. The title refers to the components of basic garden fertilizer, and Fisher makes skillful use of garden imagery to spin a vivid, complicated tale richly told. Like Mendel with his inheritance experiments, Fisher analyzes the dominant and recessive characteristics of a single family and the ways these characteristics form and re-form in destructive patterns over several generations. The ultimate outcome, of course, is murderous.

Kastning, John C
Vice Consul

The Namesake
by Jhumpa Lahiri



In *The Namesake*, Jhumpa Lahiri tells a straightforward story of the celebrations and tragedies of a family that migrates to the U.S. Starting with a graduate student in the 1970s who brings his wife to a strange new country, Ms. Lahiri beautifully weaves a clear and enriching narrative of an American-born Indian over the next 30 years. As with previous waves of migrants to the U.S., their children straddle two cultures. I was reminded of the stories my Indian friends – both in the U.S. and in India – have told me about their lives. The book is enlightening for all readers about the essential parts of life – family, love, career – and the years of adjustment endured by every family that relocates to the United States.

Remembering President Ford

I'm a Ford, not a Lincoln, Gerald R. Ford famously told Congress after he became the 38th president of the United States. The play on words (Ford being a simple model of automobile and Lincoln being a luxury model as well as the name of one of the greatest U.S. presidents) perfectly reflected the modesty of a man who until then had never sought the presidency.

Jerry Ford, as he was known to his colleagues in Congress and his constituents back in Michigan, became president in 1974 when Richard Nixon was forced to resign because of the Watergate scandal. It was a period of great turmoil in the United States. After President Ford died on December 26, 2006, President Bush paid homage to his predecessor with these words: "For a nation that needed healing, and for an office that needed a calm and steady hand, Gerald Ford came along when we needed him most. During his time in office, the American people came to know President Ford as a man of complete integrity who led our country with common sense and kind instincts."

Americans identified with and admired the man who rose from humble beginnings. Abandoned by his natural father but reared by a loving mother and stepfather, Jerry Ford had to pay his own way to get an education – waiting on tables during high school, washing dishes at university, and working as a football and boxing coach while in law school. Ford always credited his success to one thing: hard work.



Condolence book for President Ford at the Consul General's residence.

of the Chief of Protocol, U.S. Department of State, and is now part of the permanent record of a man whose life touched so many people all over the world.

Send your comments on In Touch South India or on any of the articles therein to chennaiintouch@state.gov. We will select comments for publication in the next issue.

Study With Joy

If you ever despair that our children are ungrateful and take for granted the opportunities provided for them, then you must visit the Panchayat Union Middle School in Sundaracholavaram, about 50 kilometers from Chennai. Consul General David Hopper was there on January 29 to help inaugurate the computer facilities and a science laboratory provided by the school's parent institution, Padma Seshadri Bala Bhavan (PSBB), and to donate three sets of books from the American Library.

After the ceremony, one of the students gave Mr. Hopper a poem handwritten in Tamil and dedicated to the teachers, parents and all those who played a role in the students' education. Unfortunately, we cannot identify the poet because she did not sign her work. Below is our translation:



Mr. Hopper and Mrs. Y.G. Parthasarathy, PSBB Dean, with students in a newly equipped classroom.

*We (students) are the birds that flock to this garden (school),
You extended the hand of friendship to us and earned a permanent place in our hearts,
As the rivers flow toward the sea, as the flowers tilt toward the sun's rays,
Your gaze turned towards our school,
So the students may study with joy, you graciously constructed this building!
You threw open amazing vistas in the twinkling of an eye, through the computer-aided learning lab.
The deeds you have done to the Nation are enormous, the favors you have bestowed on us are aplenty.
You provided us a place to eat,
You provided us drinking water taps to quench our thirst,
You made our School shine in bright new colors,
You set up the laboratory so that we could indulge our scientific curiosity.
The library books you lent us to widen our knowledge, the wise counsel you gave to raise the standard of our education,
You will forever remain the step ladder and a guiding spirit for our student community.
We will never forget the great help rendered to us, and we shall guard the thoughts forever in our hearts!
Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!*